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ABSTRACT

Future societal trends and implications for the college union and student activities profession are considered. Ten major trends identified by John Naisbitt in his recent book "Megatrends" are used as focal points. Attention is directed to shifts from: an industrial society to an information society; forced technology to high tech/high touch; a national economy to a world economy; short-term to long-term planning; centralization to decentralization; institutional help to self-help; a representative to participatory democracy; hierarchies to networking; North to South; and either/or to multiple options. Specific projections include: operations of unions and student activities staff will be computerized; there will be a need to provide additional personalization to staff and students; the closely related trends of self-help and high touch (human response) will probably have the greatest challenges for the profession; student involvement in policy decisions will become more meaningful; and the competition for student enrollment will increase for the Northeast United States, while the three growth megastates (California, Florida, and Texas) will be oversubscribed. Harold K. Hodgkinson's projections of the college student populations in the 1990s are also listed. (SW)

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A LOOK AT THE FUTURE

From the College Union and Activities Perspective

Joseph W. Benedict Jr.

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A look at the future

from the college union and activities perspective

Joseph H. Benedict Jr.

Higher education must face the challenge of surviving a rapidly changing society during the next several years. Those of us who work on college campuses need to be aware of societal trends so that we can help students cope with the changes of the future.

"Change favors those who are prepared for change," writes John Naisbitt in his bestseller, *Megatrends*. Naisbitt's book gives us the opportunity to consider how the changing times will affect our personal and professional lives and allows us to focus on the impact the changes will have on students and their campus relationships.

From a content analysis of community newspapers from all over the country, Naisbitt and his staff have identified ten major trends. The ten megatrends Naisbitt describes are shifts from:

- an industrial society to an information society;
- forced technology to high tech/high touch;
- a national economy to a world economy;
- short-term to long-term planning;
- centralization to decentralization;
- institutional help to self-help;
- a representative to participatory democracy;
- hierarchies to networking;
- North to South; and
- either/or to multiple options.

"Trends, like racehorses, are easier to ride in the direction that they are going," warns Naisbitt. It is important that we examine the trend forecasts so that we can identify the potential impact of trends on our college union and student activities programs.

What are the implications of these trends for us? Will our colleges and universities meet the challenges of change? Will our institutions survive? How do these megatrends affect our college union and student activities programs? We need to consider these questions now so that we can "ride the trends in the direction that they are going."

Naisbitt motivated me to do some thinking, and I urge you to look into your own crystal balls. The following are some of my thoughts about the possible ramifications of Naisbitt's forecasted trends for the college union and student activities profession.

Information society

Rooms in our unions will have computers (maybe even coin-operated models) for student academic use. All of our operations will be computerized, and we will communicate with each other electronically via CRTs. Unions will install satellite dishes on their roofs for programming and other applications.

High tech/high touch

"Whenever new technology is introduced, there must be a counter balancing human response (high touch) or the technology will fail," advises Naisbitt. Thus we will need to provide additional "personalization" for our staffs and students. Our traditional programs and services may not satisfy the needs of future student populations; an ongoing assessment will be needed. Our leadership training designs will need to focus on a "collective theme" instead of a "specialized theme," and we will need to develop programs to help students cope with change. Seminars and forums on values clarification and human motivation will be necessary.

World economy

College union and student activities professionals will need to be more effective "role models" within the projected multicultural campus community. We will become a trilingual society that speaks English, Spanish, and computer. Our staff will have to become more "culturally aware" of the students on campus, particularly in light of the potential increase of foreign students. The "I" in ACU-I will undoubtedly have greater significance.

Long-term planning

Will college union and student activities programs play a role on our campuses during the next decade? What business are we in? Do we have a strategic vision, a shared image with the total campus environment, of what we want to achieve? Naisbitt writes, "Strategic planning must be completely geared to a strategic vision and know exactly where it is going, with clarity that remains in spite of the confusion natural to the first stages of change."

George Keller's book, *Academic Strategy: The Management Revolution in Higher Education*, is a superb resource for strategic planning in higher education. Naisbitt and Keller agree that there will be greater cooperation between higher education and industry in the future. Does your college union or student activities program have potential in this area? Can we offer programs and services to industry in exchange for something to meet our needs, such as use of their computers during downtime?

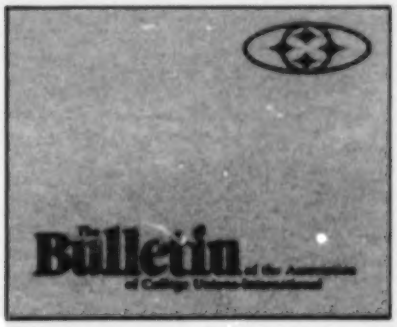
Decentralization

This trend creates some conflict for me because my campus is currently becoming centralized. However, Keller resolved my conflict when he quoted from Rourke's and Brooks' *Managerial Revolution in Higher Education*:

> *Periods of growth and affluence appear more likely to leave decision-making power in the hands of academic officials and to invite widespread decentralization of expenditures. **Periods of scarcity... tend to give more power to financial officials and to push a university toward centralized decision-making.*** (1966, p. 85)

Many of us either are currently experiencing a centralized mode or will be in the near future. Our professional associations (ACU-I and NACA), on the other hand, will undoubtedly experience more decentralization of the central offices—a process already well in motion for both organizations. Paul Knapp, executive director of the Association of Physical Plant Administrators, warns, "Associations that don't recognize and adapt to this trend could end up in serious trouble" (Note 1). Fortunately, ACU-I and NACA have long recognized their regional structures as their foundations. Their strengths

June



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Since the first of the year, we've been calling this publication the "new *Bulletin*." So far, we've given the *Bulletin* a new cover and some new graphics on the inside.

But we know you can't judge a book (or a periodical) by its cover. It's what's inside that counts.

With this issue, we're entering the next phase of the "new *Bulletin*," a stage that focuses on content rather than cosmetics. We're working on developing an editorial formula, a key element of which is theme sections.

In the theme sections, you will find related articles on topics relevant to the college union and student activities field. These feature sections will be the work of guest editors, members of the profession who come up with a topic, develop the idea, identify and recruit authors who have expertise in the selected area, and organize the articles into a coherent package for *Bulletin* readers.

Some of you may remember the supplements published in the *Bulletin* from 1980 to 1982 and may be thinking theme sections are nothing new. And to a degree, you're right. Yesterday's supplements and today's theme sections are both efforts to provide an in-depth look at specific subjects of importance to the profession.

The difference is largely philosophical. By definition, a supplement is "something added, especially to make up for a lack or deficiency." The *Bulletin* supplements were set off graphically from the rest of the publication and were promoted as "coverage not available through the normal format of the *Bulletin*."

Now the format has changed, and we think the *Bulletin* is an appropriate medium for in-depth coverage of the topics relevant to college unions and student activities. By the end of 1985, we plan to make theme sections pivotal, rather than supplemental, in the *Bulletin's* editorial formula.

To play such a central role, these sections have to focus on the right themes, the "hot topics" of the profession. We're slating theme sections for 1985 and we need your suggestions.

Tell us what topics you'd like to see featured in the *Bulletin*, and feel free to suggest authors and guest editors. If you'd like to serve as a guest editor, propose a topic and submit a preliminary outline of articles that would examine that topic.

We're building an editorial plan around the needs and interests of the profession. Only you can tell us what those are.

Nancy Davis

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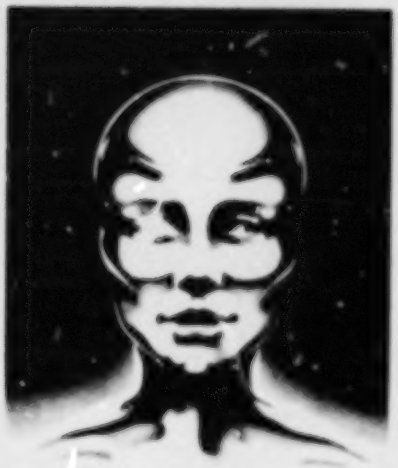

"Our profession's strength in surviving the changing environment depends on our ability . . . to give and receive support from each other."

are derived from the "grass-roots" regions.

Self-help

Over the last several years, heavy emphasis has been placed on self-improvement: nutrition, physical fitness, continued learning and the like. It seems reasonable that health clubs and fitness centers as well as health food shops may be added to the list of college union facilities. In addition, clinics and mini-university programs on health, nutrition, self-defense, finance and others will again become popular. Retired volunteers, particularly those in our field and guidance officers in high schools, will be knocking on our doors to lend assistance to our operations; the "payoff" for them will be the human interaction with the college population. The closely related trends of self-help and high touch will probably have the greatest implications and challenges for our profession.

Participatory democracy

The concept of "collegiality," in spite of faculty unions, will probably resurface on our campuses. Student involvement in policy decisions will become more meaningful, particularly if alumni are encouraged to provide financial assistance. College union and student activities professionals will play a vital role in this process because of their expertise in group dynamics and human development.

Networking

Naisbitt defines networking as "people talking to each other, sharing ideas, information and resources." The familiar "old boy network" is being replaced by a "horizontal network"—an environment in which "rewards come by empowering others, not by climbing over them," says Naisbitt. The recent deregulation of AT&T will reportedly make long-distance telephone networking more cost-effective in the future; this will provide additional opportunities for professional sharing and resources.

A strength of both ACU-I and NACA has always been their established network of volunteers. Both organizations once had their own "old boy networks"; however, this phenomenon is on the decline. Professionals in the field have long had a horizontal network that has been effective in a variety of endeavors—from conference program sessions to specialized activities and constructing multi million dollar college unions. Surely, our students, unions, and programs have been the beneficiaries of our willingness to share information and to use each other as resources. Our profession's strength in surviving the changing environment depends on our ability to continue to give and receive support from each other.

South movement

The trend actually is a West, Southwest and Florida movement. Naisbitt forecasts the three growth megastates as being California, Florida, and Texas. The Northeast, which has the largest concentration of colleges and universities, will see a population decline. Obviously, the competition for student enrollment will increase for the Northeast, while the three megastates and ten cities of opportunity (Austin, Albuquerque, Denver, Phoenix, Salt Lake City, San Antonio, San Diego, San Jose, Tampa and Tucson) will be oversubscribed. In all geographic areas, strategic plans need to be developed so that union buildings and activities programs will be solvent and able to meet the needs of our campus communities.

Multiple options

We are already a society of multiple options. Our student bodies are committed to giving themselves as many "life options" as possible when they enter the "real world." Campuses have been fostering multiple options for years by allowing undeclared majors, drop/add options, dual majors, etc. College union and student activities professionals need to keep current so they can effectively "ride this trend." We will need to provide flexible and diverse food service options with a focus on computer dining cards, ethnic fast foods, etc. Programs will need multicultural themes and a "smorgasbord" delivery system; satellite dishes and large-screen televisions will be strategically placed in our unions. Our traditional hours of operation may change; we may even be open 24 hours a day.

Obviously, I do not have all the answers, and sometimes I wonder if I am even posing the right questions. Our entire society is changing and readjusting and higher education is a part of that change. In the metropolitan New York area, for instance, a local university offered a computer course during the Spring 1984 semester on a weekly basis over the Public Broadcasting Station. If the course was taken for college credit, a registration fee was charged. Is this the direction of higher education or continued learning in the future? What role do the college union and student activities play in the lives of these students? How do we publicize our strategic vision? Are we in the right business?

There are additional factors for us to consider; in particular we need to focus on the current research and projections of the college student populations in the 1990s. Harold K. Hodgkinson, senior fellow at the Institute for Educational Leadership in Washington, D.C., recently shared his projections in an article in *Academe*

(1983). His research certainly validates much of Naisbitt's trend forecasts. Hodgkinson makes the following projections:

- There will be a general decrease in the size of high school graduation classes for 16 years, followed by increased numbers beginning in 1998. But other factors make it difficult to predict increased college enrollments after 1998;
- By 1990, minorities of all ages will constitute 20 to 25 percent of the total population, while their percentage among youth cohorts will be over 30 percent;
- Births and birthrates are up in the Sunbelt and holding even or still declining in most of the Frostbelt;
- Frostbelt institutions can look forward to at least a decade of declining enrollments;
- Young people will move directly from high school to well-paying jobs, either bypassing college entirely or deferring college for a few years;
- Many more women and blacks (particularly males) will be encouraged to enter professional schools;
- Today, about 12 million people attend colleges and universities in the United States; however, another 46 million adults are being educated by other service providers;
- There is good reason to believe that a large segment of the current elementary school class of the 1980s will be unable or unwilling to consider college when they are 18;
- There will be 30 million adults over 65 by 1990, and they will undoubtedly be seeking "continued learning";
- Far more educational decision making will take place at the state and regional levels during the next 10 to 20 years;
- Collaboration with industry, the military and other users of educational services will bring new programs to higher education;
- New kinds of educational services among the over 65 age group should provide some stimulating new challenges;
- Retiring white workers will find themselves increasingly dependent on a work force heavily composed of minorities to pay their Social Security trust funds; and
- Previous policies like "benign neglect" seemed reasonable to some when the percentage of minorities was 10-12 percent, but what state (institution) can neglect 40-50 percent of its youth?

"We can survive, and we will survive. However, we need to focus on a strategic vision over the next decade and remember Naisbitt's statement that 'change favors those who are prepared for change.'"

Hodgkinson's studies suggest that our nation and our campuses will experience many demographic changes by 1990, which will certainly have environmental implications for our campuses, college unions, and student activities programs. We need not only to focus on future populations to satisfy our own areas of responsibility, but also to act as catalysts for others in our profession and respective institutions to meet these challenges effectively.

Will we survive the next decade? George Keller (1983) estimates that "between 10 and 30 percent of America's 3,100 colleges and universities will close their doors or merge with other institutions by 1995." For those situated in the Northeast, it is not a particularly optimistic outlook; however, we must be creative in our thought processes to meet the challenges. Naisbitt warns:

> *There are cities and companies, unions and political parties...(colleges and universities)...that are like dinosaurs waiting for the weather to change. The very ground is shifting beneath us.* ***And what is called for is nothing less than all of us reconceptualizing our roles.*** [Emphasis added] (1982. p. 95)

Change and adversity have stimulated creativity in the past, and I am confident that we will be innovative in meeting the challenges of the future. We can survive, and we will survive. However, we need to focus on a strategic vision over the next decade and remember Naisbitt's statement that "change favors those who are prepared for change."

Megatrends concludes on a positive philosophical theme which can inspire and motivate all of us:

> *Although the time between eras is uncertain, it is a great and yeasty time, filled with opportunity. If we can learn to make uncertainty our friend, we can achieve more than in stable eras.*
>
> *But in time of the parenthesis (time between eras) we have extraordinary leverage and influence—individually, professionally, and institutionally—if we can only get a clear sense, a clear conception, a clear vision, of the road ahead.*
>
> *My God, what a fantastic time to be alive! (1982, p. 252)*

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